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EDITORIAL COMMENT



THE NEW YORK STATE MEETING

THE second meeting of the New York States Nurses' Association was held at the Academy of Medicine in New York City on Thursday and Friday, January 30 and 31, 1902, the president, Miss Sylveen V. Nye, in the chair.

By a majority of fifty-four to nineteen the eligibility standard was fixed upon the composite lines which have been advocated in this JOURNAL, and graduates from training-schools connected with general hospitals, without regard to size, and from schools connected with the New York State hospitals for the insane and those from other States having the same standard were declared eligible for membership. This result was reached after a prolonged and bitter struggle, won by the women whose training in the broader alumnae associations and clubs had given them a clearer comprehension of the situation, with the self-control and toleration which comes to men and women alike only through experience in organization work.

It will be remembered by those women who attended the first meeting in Albany that a constitution was adopted there, and that this constitution was purposely made as brief as possible, containing only the name and the object of the association and the names of the officers, being purposely limited to the articles required by law in incorporation. It was decided by that body that, in view of the fact that the society was in a constructive stage, all other regulations for its management should be incorporated in the by-laws, where they could be more easily amended, as during the first few years it would undoubtedly be necessary to make frequent changes in the construction of the society. No provision was made at the Albany meeting for incorporation, but a committee of five was appointed from the floor to act with the officers in preparing a set of by-laws which were to be submitted for the consideration of the members at the next meeting.

At the meeting in New York the roll-call showed seventeen (afterwards increased to twenty-two) out of fifty-five members enrolled at the Albany meeting to be present, while on the other side of the house was a much larger body of nurses who had come into the meeting, many of them prominent, well-known women in the profession, with others who were unknown to the majority of the original members.

After the reading of the minutes of the Albany meeting and the roll-call, upon a suggestion from the chair a motion was made that a recess of fifteen minutes should be taken, and that those visiting members who wished to join the association should be given the opportunity of enrolling their names and paying one dollar and a half as an initiation fee, and be given the full privilege of membership, with the right to vote. This motion led to an animated discussion, in which objection was raised by one party that it was irregular and inexpedient to admit more members until after the eligibility standard had been fixed, while it was argued by the other side, and also by the chair, that, in view of

the fact that the society was not incorporated, eligibility was not required, but that members should be admitted to this meeting to become charter members upon the same lines as those who had joined the society at Albany. The motion, being finally put to vote, was lost.

Next came the report of the By-Laws Committee, which was read by the chairman, Miss Davids, in which were outlined practically the standards of eligibility and membership which were afterwards adopted. Immediately the chair presented to the audience a printed constitution containing ten articles, the first three articles being an exact reproduction of those adopted by the society in Albany. This printed paper was distributed to the members and visitors present. Miss Palmer asked the chair who had prepared this printed constitution, stating that she, as a member of the By-Laws Committee, had not known of its preparation until this moment. The chair explained that the printed constitution was of her own preparation, that she had been unable, for various personal reasons, to call the committee together, and in the discussion which followed the following facts were brought out: The By-Laws Committee was composed of the officers and five members, one-half of whom lived in New York or its immediate vicinity, the other five residing in the western section of the State. At the hurried meeting held in the Albany Hospital, after the Albany meeting, it was decided that those members residing in the eastern section of the State should prepare suggestions for by-laws, which should be sent to the president and by her transmitted to the other members in the western section of the State. The eastern members did their work and submitted their skeleton early in June, but the western members had never been called together and had been given no opportunity to know that the suggestions had been made by the other half of the committee, and the presentation of the entirely new constitution by the chair came as a great surprise to the members of the committee and was most demoralizing in its influence upon the audience. Further, it was brought out in discussion that there had been no meeting of the officers of the association since their election. The president had arranged for the rental of the Academy of Medicine, but had not engaged an official stenographer, the unfortunate result being much trouble for the secretary, and leaving the sensational newspaper reports as the only public record of the proceedings. Her explanation of want of time owing to unusual pressure of business, complicated with serious illness in her family, was accepted in a cordial spirit.

The point was then made that as the three first articles, dealing with the name, object, and officers, had been adopted at Albany they could not be brought up again for action, and that the fourth article in the printed constitution presented by the chair, dealing with "Duties of Officers," should be taken as Article I. in the by-laws and accepted without change. This was carried. The next article in the paper presented by the chair, under "Members," was worded as follows:

"All nurses residing in New York State who have graduated from a training-school connected with a hospital existing in conformity with the laws of its State, and giving a course of training of two years or over, or, if graduation occurred prior to January 1, 1897, of one year or over, are eligible to membership."

This clause as it stood was lost with but little discussion, and a motion having been made by Miss Palmer that the eligibility clause as submitted by the eastern members of the By-Laws Committee should be considered, the remainder of the day was spent in its discussion. The time for adjournment came without

the motion having been brought to vote, although calls of "Question" were repeatedly made. The chair requested that the motion be held over until the next day.

Upon the opening of the session on Friday Miss Palmer withdrew her motion for the purpose of making a fresh start and ending the fruitless discussion of the preceding day, after which a reconsideration of the question to admit the visitors to membership was asked for by the chair, and upon motion being made in proper form it was carried without opposition. A recess was taken and sixty-two nurses enrolled, after which came the noon adjournment.

At the afternoon session the chair pronounced the proceedings of the previous day as to eligibility as "null and void," and called for a re-reading of the Albany minutes for the benefit of the new members. Miss Davids then moved an adjournment on the ground of the incomplete work of the By-Laws Committee. Miss Dock objected, as it would be a waste of time and money for many who had come long distances at their own expense, and asked Miss Davids to withdraw her motion for adjournment, but this she declined to do. The motion was put to vote and lost. Miss Dock then proposed putting aside the work of the eastern members of the By-Laws Committee and taking up again the printed form presented by the president as a basis upon which to work. This was carried. The article relating to members was then again considered, to which Miss Dock proposed the following amendment:

"SECTION I. *Eligibility.* All resident nurses of New York State who have graduated from general hospitals, without regard to the present size, and from New York State hospitals for the insane and those from other States having a standard equal to that of the New York State hospitals, giving a course of training of two years or over, or, if graduation occurred prior to January 1, 1897, of one year or over, shall be eligible to membership."

She then proposed as Section II. of the same article the following:

"SECTION II. *Composition of Members.* Members may be delegates from organized local associations in proportion to their number, with votes proportionate to their constituency, and individual members having each a single vote, such members to be asked to organize into local associations when they shall have reached twenty-five members in a county."

This was also carried by fifty-four to nineteen.

It was three o'clock of the afternoon of the last session when this motion was proposed, and but one hour remained for work. In this time, in spite of occasional attempts which were still made to obstruct or delay proceedings, the articles remaining on the president's constitution were considered one by one, amended, and adopted, forming the basis of a set of by-laws,—incomplete, it is true, but still covering the most important points.

The whole question of dues was held over to be considered at the next meeting, as the brief time made it impossible to give so important a subject proper deliberation. A Committee on Nominations was appointed, also a Committee on Incorporation, with instructions to act immediately. The annual meeting, which had been fixed in the president's constitution for the third Tuesday in January, 1903, was amended to read, "the third Tuesday in April, 1902," which is the calendar year from the Albany meeting.

At the April meeting the question of dues must be finally completed and many minor regulations in the by-laws must be agreed upon. The appointment of a committee to study the question of submitting a bill to the Legislature might be made. This committee should present its report at a later meeting. We hold

that fairness and integrity demand that there should be the fullest opportunity given to every member to share in the preparation of such a bill, and that no steps should be taken towards the preparation of a bill or towards legislation until the by-laws are completed and it has been demonstrated that the society is properly organized for work. When the time comes for the association to present the bill at Albany they must be able to say that it has been considered and approved by the majority at least of all the nurses in the State. They must also have time to secure for it the support of the public through organized bodies of all kinds, otherwise they will not succeed nor deserve to succeed.

It now rests with all the local organizations to show that they feel the responsibility of maintaining a strong, conservative policy in the State Association by representative self-government.

At the April meeting, until the question of quorum has been fixed in the by-laws, any number of members present, however small, can transact business.

No new members can be admitted at this meeting until the by-laws have been completed and a committee appointed to consider applications.

Members who are delegates should be instructed by their societies as to what they consider a fair proportion of votes, whether it shall be a vote for every ten members or twenty-five members, and in what proportion the members shall be assessed per capita. The usual assessment for multiple representation is ten cents per capita. This ratio is followed by the Trained Nurses' Associated Alumnae of the United States and by the largest and most representative women's clubs of different kinds in the country.

It is conceded by the leaders who have advocated composite membership with plural voting that this is not the ideal plan for the organization of a State society, but in the beginning it seems to be the only just way of recognizing and utilizing the organizations already in existence, and at the same time of giving recognition to the individual members of the profession who are living in sections of the country where no organizations exist. The ideal organization for the future is the County Association, and as the years go on this will undoubtedly be the lines upon which the State Association will be developed.

AN IMPORTANT CORRECTION

One of the many sensational newspaper reports we feel we may, without loss of dignity, correct. It relates to the discussion held on Article V. of the president's by-laws, providing for "three trustees," which raised the question of the advisability of including physicians in the management of the association. Miss Dock drew attention to the troubles and difficulties which had arisen in other countries by giving the control of nurses' organizations into the hands of medical men, arguing that the most ethical men, whom we most esteem, would refuse to hold such positions, while they would always be willing to advise and help us, while those who would be willing to assume such positions would be the ones who could not always be trusted to work for our interests, and that they might prevent our development as individuals and as women. She finished by saying, "As my only brother is a medical man, I think I cannot be accused of disloyalty to the medical profession." Miss Palmer then arose and claimed the right to endorse all that Miss Dock had said, as she was the daughter of a physician. The newspaper reports of these remarks represented them as an attack upon physicians, which was wholly false.